

HEPATOCELLULAR CARCINOMA FACT SHEET

Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) is the most common type of liver cancer in adults, accounting for 75% of all liver malignancies. While many cancers may originate in other parts of the body and spread to the liver, HCC originates from the main liver cells, called hepatocytes. There are two different growth patterns that occur in patients with HCC: as a single tumor that grows larger, or more frequently, as smaller cancer nodules throughout the liver which grow into multiple tumors¹.

Last year in the US, it is estimated that more than 21,000 people were diagnosed with liver cancer and over 18,000 people died from the disease².

Risk factors

Men are more than twice as likely as women to be diagnosed with HCC, and the disease most frequently affects people over the age of 45³.

The most common risk factor is chronic hepatitis B or C infection⁴. Cirrhosis, which is frequently caused by hepatitis, is associated with 50-80% of HCC patients^{2,4}. Due in part to high incidence of hepatitis in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, HCC is among the leading causes of cancer-related death in these regions⁵.

Other risk factors for HCC include race, diabetes, obesity, use of anabolic steroids and exposure to vinyl chloride, thorium dioxide, aflatoxins and arsenic⁴.

In the US, African Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, Hispanics and American Indians/Alaska Natives are at increased risk of developing HCC⁴.

Treatment options

Patients with HCC are more likely to live longer when the cancer is detected before it has spread, or is in early stages. The five-year survival rate for patients with resectable early stage cancer ranges from 30% to 60%. However, patients with advanced HCC have a five-year survival rate of less than 5%^{7,8}.

When detected in early stages, surgery to remove the tumor is the only likely curative treatment option. Unfortunately, only a small number of liver cancers are found in the early stages and can be removed surgically^{7,8}.

Treatment options for those who are not eligible for surgery include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy and embolization⁸.

Symptoms of HCC⁶

Symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- **Pain in the upper abdomen**
- **Swollen abdomen**
- **Weight loss**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Weakness or fatigue**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Yellow skin and eyes**
- **Dark urine from jaundice**
- **Fever**

References

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6. National Cancer Institute. "What You Need to Know About Liver Cancer: Symptoms." Available at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/liver/page5>. Accessed May 2009.
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